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ABSTRACT

Psychologists and laymen alike often use the terms "shame" and "guilt" interchangeably. Guilt is an affective state most often associated with a focus on some past behaviors which the subject finds inconsistent with a set of internalized standards which are often, but not necessarily moral in nature. Shame involves less of a focus on specific behaviors and more of a focus on the entire self. A new measure for assessing individual differences in proneness to shame and guilt for adults, the Self-Conscious Affect and Attribution Inventory (SCAAI) was evaluated. Subjects (N=100) were undergraduate students who completed the Revised Shame-Guilt Scale by Hoblitzelle, the Mosher Forced Choice Guilt Inventory by Mosher, and the SCAAI. Results suggested that the SCAAI yields related, but functionally distinct, indices of proneness to shame and proneness to guilt. The SCAAI subscales demonstrated reliability, as indicated by analyses the subscales' internal consistency. The pattern of relations among SCAAI subscales, as well as their relationship to extant measures of shame and guilt, lends strong support for the validity of this measure. These results provide encouragement for researchers interested in addressing a wide range of issues related to individual differences in moral affective style. (ABL)

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Assessing Individual Differences in Proneness to Shame and Guilt: Development of the Self-Conscious Affect and Attribution Inventory

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Assessing Individual Differences in Proneness to Shame and Guilt:

Development of the Self-Conscious Affect and Attribution Inventory

Psychologists and laymen alike often use the terms "shame" and "guilt" interchangeably. The results of Lindsay-Hartz (1984), and our own results indicate that verbal, well-educated adults have great difficulty defining and distinguishing between shame and guilt in the abstract. But phenomenological studies clearly indicate that these are distinct affective experiences. Lindsay-Hartz (1984) has shown that when people describe their own personal shame and guilt experiences, these descriptions differ consistently along a number of dimensions.

Guilt is an affective state most often associated with a focus on some past behavior or set of behaviors which the subject finds inconsistent with a set of internalized standards -- often, but not necessarily, moral in nature. Thus, guilt involves the perception that one has done something "bad". But although the person experiencing guilt may feel for the moment as if s/he is a "bad person", his or her self-concept and identity remain essentially intact. Motivation and behavior arising from the guilt experience tend to be oriented toward reparative action -- confessing, apologizing, undoing, repairing. While guilt is clearly an uncomfortable experience, the shame experience can be devastatingly painful. Shame involves less of a focus on specific behaviors and more of a focus on the entire self. It is the entire self which is painfully scrutinized and negatively evaluated. Thus, the shame experience involves a considerable shift in self-perception, often accompanied by a sense of exposure, by a sense of shrinking, of being small, and by a sense of worthlessness and powerlessness. The motivational and behavioral manifestations of shame stand in sharp contrast to those of guilt. The person in the midst of a shame experience is most likely to want to hide from others generally, and more specifically to remove him or herself from the interpersonal situation(s) which gave rise to this experience.

Everyone has experienced shame and guilt at various points in day-to-day life -- that is, we each have the capacity to experience both of these emotions. But there is reason to suspect that some people are more prone to one than the other. The clinical observations of Helen Block Lewis (1971), among others, indicate that when faced with negative situations, some people are more biased toward responding with shame, while others are more likely to respond with guilt. No doubt, some kinds of situations differentially pull for shame and other types of situations are more likely to result in guilt. But we encounter, day in and day out, a myriad of more ambiguous situations -- and it is in response to these more ambiguous situations that individual differences in moral affective style are likely to be revealed.

Given the hypothesized importance of shame and guilt in the development and maintenance of both adaptive social behavior (Hoffman, 1982a, 1982b) and maladaptive interpersonal and intrapersonal processes (Hoblitzelle, 1987; Morrison, 1987; Prosen, Clark, Harrow & Fawcett, 1983; Lewis, 1971), it is surprising how little empirical research has addressed these affective experiences. No doubt, one reason for the paucity of rigorous research in this area lies in the problem of assessment. There is, at present, no clearly accepted, reliable and valid measure which assesses and differentiates shame and guilt.

Mosher's (1966) Forced-Choice Guilt Inventory is by far the most widely used measure of guilt. This measure is comprised of three subscales: sex-guilt, hostility guilt, and morality-conscience. The sex-guilt scale has been used in many studies, but these studies for the most part have addressed a circumscribed set of questions concerning human sexuality. The other two more general guilt scales — hostility guilt and morality-conscience — have been used much less frequently. The Mosher inventory is presumably a measure of guilt, but a closer inspection of its items reveals that the inventory and each of its subscales tap into both shame and guilt experiences. Thus, Mosher's inventory could more appropriately be labelled a measure of "shame/guilt".

There are a number of lesser known measures, virtually all unpublished, which have attempted to differentiate between shame and guilt. Hoblitzelle (1987, in press) recently evaluated the reliability and validity of these lesser known measures. Unfortunately, Hoblitzelle's results from two independent samples raise questions about the reliability, validity, and utility of extant measures which purport to differentiate shame and guilt. Of the four measures designed to assess both shame and guilt, Hoblitzelle's (1987) revision of Gioiella's (1981) Adjective Checklist appeared strongest. But even for this measure, the evidence for divergent validity was rather weak. And this is a major problem, because one of our most difficult tasks is to develop distinct shame and guilt subscales which remain differentiated.

The relative congruence of shame and guilt factors derived from Hoblitzelle's (1987) Revised Shame-Guilt Scale is not all that surprising when one considers the nature of the task presented to subjects. The checklist is comprised of 16 adjectives thought to be most directly relevant to shame (e.g., mortified, humiliated, embarrassed, etc.) and 20 adjectives more directly linked to guilt (e.g., unethical, immoral, liable, culpable). Subjects are asked to rate the degree to which each adjective describes themselves. But although the content of the adjectives may vary subtly in terms of shame and guilt, the nature of the task itself would appear to tap into a shame-like phenomena. The subjects are asked to make global attributions <u>about the self</u> as opposed to describing or evaluating circumscribed <u>behaviors</u> embedded within local contexts. In this light, one might view the Revised Shame-Guilt Scale as a relatively undifferentiated index of proneness to shame. In addition to this conceptual difficulty, the Revised Shame-Guilt Scale presents a secondary drawback in that it demands advanced verbal skills on the part of respondents, limiting its utility beyond well-educated, upper socioeconomic status populations.

In summary, the current literature offers few, if any, options to the investigator which to assess and differentiate between proneness to shame and proneness to guilt. Extant measures have not attempted to differentiate between these two affective experiences, or show poor divergent validity in this area.

This paper describes the initial stages of the development of a new adult measure for assessing individual differences in proneness to shame and guilt. Drawing on current attribution theory (e.g., Weiner, 1980; Peterson, Schwartz & Seligman, 1981), Lewis' (1971) psychodynamic framework, and phenomenological descriptions of these self-conscious experiences (Lewis, 1971; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984), we have developed a measure to assess characteristic affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses associated with shame and guilt. The Self-Conscious Affect and Attribution Inventory (SCAAI) consists of a series of brief scenarios, some negative and some positive in valence, which a college student would be likely to encounter in day-to-day life. Following each scenario,

subjects indicate their likelihood of responding in a number of alternative manners. Responses across the varied scenarios are aggregated to create indices of proneness to shame, proneness to guilt, proneness to externalize cause or blame, and a characteristic tendency to respond with detachment/unconcern. Two additional modes of response are assessed in connection with the positively valenced scenarios: a tendency to respond with feelings of pride in entire self (which we term "alpha pride"), and a tendency to respond with feelings of pride stemming from evaluation of the specific behavior (which we term "beta pride"). However, since these latter two measures of pride are based on only three items in the current version of the SCAAI, they be a secondary focus.

As a first step in evaluating the validity and utility of the Self-Conscious Affect and Attribution Inventory (SCAAI), undergraduate college students were administered the SCAAI, the hostility guilt and morality-conscience guilt subscales of the Mosher Forced-Choice Guilt Inventory (Mosher, 1966), and the Revised Shame-Guilt Scale (Hoblitzelle, 1987, in press). Of primary interest is (1) the pattern of relationships among the SCAAI subscales, and (2) the relation of the SCAAI shame and guilt subscales to Mosher's measure and to factors derived from the Revised Shame-Guilt Scale.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 100 undergraduate students attending one of two large state universities. The majority of students (86%) participated in partial fulfillment of an undergraduate psychology course requirement. The remaining 14% were volunteer participants. Subjects ranged in age from 15 to 36 (X=19.3). 66% were female. Regarding race/ethnicity, 65.3% were white, 6.9% black, 23.8% asian, and 4% other. 25.7% reported their primary religious affiliation in childhood as Catholic, 22.8% Protestant, 31.7% Jewish, 5% an eastern faith, 1% other, and 13.9% reported no particular religious affiliation.

Measures and Procedures

The data reported here were collected in the course of a larger on-going investigation of the personality and cognitive correlates of proneness to shame and guilt. At the beginning of the study, informed consent forms were distributed describing the general nature of the procedures. Subjects were advised that the investigation was "a psychological study to learn more about emotions, perceptions, and styles of thinking among normal, young adults". Measures administered during the first one-hour session included the following.

The Revised Shame-Guilt Scale (Hoblitzelle, 1987) consists of 36 adjectives relevant to the constructs of shame and guilt. Subjects rated, on a 7-point scale, the degree to which each adjective describes themselves. A priori shame and guilt scales were created by summing responses to 16 and 20 adjectives, respectively. In addition, cluster scores were created based on the three-factor solution reported by Hoblitzelle (1987). Items with factor loadings greater than .50 were retained, resulting in a Shame cluster comprised of seven adjectives, an Affectful Guilt cluster comprised of eight adjectives (e.g., remorseful, repentant, etc.), and a Non-Affectful Guilt cluster comprised of nine items (e.g., unethical, immoral, delinquent, etc.).

Mosher Forced Choice Guilt Inventory (Mosher, 1966) is a 79 item inventory which yields a total guilt score and three subscales: sex-guilt, hostility-guilt, and morality-conscience. In the current investigation, only the latter two subscales were employed. The 28 sex-guilt items were excluded from the protocols.

Self-Conscious Affect and Attribution Inventory is a paper-and-pencil measure developed by the current investigator. This measure is designed to assess characteristic affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses associated with shame and guilt. The inventory consists of a series of brief scenarios, some positive and some negative in valence, followed by a number of alternative responses. Subjects are asked to rate, on a five-point scale, how likely they would be to respond in each manner indicated. Initially, the SCAAI was comprised of 12 negatively valenced scenarios and three positively valenced scenarios. Two of the negative scenarios were subsequently dropped, yielding a current version comprised of 13 scenarios.

The ten negatively valenced scenarios are each followed by responses indicating shame, guilt, externalization, and detachment/unconcern. For example, subjects are asked to consider the following situation:

> "A friend asks you to do him/her a favor. Though you could reasonably go out of your way slightly, you just don't feel like doing it. So you turn him/her down. Later you tell yourself..."

Subjects then rate the likelihood of responding in each of the following manners:

> "Why am I so selfish?" (Shame).
> "I'll find a way to make up for this." (Guilt).
> "Some people expect too much from their friends." (Externalization).
> "This kind of thing happens now and then between friends." (Detachment/Unconcern).

The latter two types of response were included in order to provide subjects with a range of likely options (rather than forcing them to rate only shame and guilt responses). In addition, the resulting subscales of externalization and detachment/unconcern provide the opportunity to test out a number of theoretically derived hypotheses.

The three positively valenced scenarios are followed by responses indicating shame, guilt, and externalization, as well as two types of pride: feelings of pride in the entire self (which we term "alpha pride"), and feelings of pride stemming from evaluation of the specific behavior (which we term "beta pride"). For example, subjects are asked to consider the following situation:

> "You and your best friend each submit a project to a competition. You win. You..."

Subjects then rate the likelihood of responding in each of the following manners:

> "..wish you did not have to attend the award ceremony." (Shame).
> "Worry about your best friend. He/she worked hard, too." (Guilt).
> "Think: Boy was I lucky!" (Externalization).
> "Are pleased that you have such talent." (Alpha pride).
> "Are glad that you had worked so hard and it had paid off." (Beta pride).

Positively valenced scenarios were included for several reasons. First, it seems important to assess the degree to which an individual is prone to respond with shame or guilt solely in negative situations, or to situations regardless of valence. Second, the positive scenarios allow the evaluation of some important theoretical controversies. Finally, the social and emotional implications of relatively stable tendencies to experience pride — and the distinction between alpha pride and beta pride — are of interest in their own right. Inquiry in this area, too, has been hampered by a lack of adequate measures. However, since the positively valenced scenarios were included as a pilot component of the current version of the SCAAI, and since the two measures of pride are based on only three items, they will be of secondary focus here.

The order of responses (e.g., shame, guilt, externalizing, detachment/unconcern, alpha pride, and beta pride) following each scenario was randomly determined. Subjects were also given the opportunity to provide and rate an additional response, if they so desired.

Distributions for the individual items were examined for the possibility of a restriction of range. All items yielded considerable variability. Responses were then aggregated across the negative and positive scenarios to create inventory subscales.

Shame and guilt are viewed as related but distinct affective responses, and the SCAAI represents an attempt to differentiate proneness to shame from proneness to guilt. An item analysis revealed that most individual shame items correlated more substantially with the shame subscale than with the guilt subscale, and vice versa, with the exception of responses to two of the original 15 scenarios. These two scenarios were subsequently dropped, yielding a final version comprised of 13 scenarios. Shame and guilt subscales from this final version correlated .48.

The current data set does not provide the opportunity to assess test-retest reliability of the subscales, which would be the reliability index of choice given the multidimensional nature of our assessment. (The SCAAI was constructed by sampling affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses associated with shame and guilt). Analyses of the internal consistency of these subscales were conducted using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. Table 1 shows that the internal consistency of the four central subscales of the SCAAI was moderately high, with alpha coefficients ranging from .64 to .82, more than satisfactory given than Cronbach's alpha yields lower-bound estimates of reliability when applied to heterogenous scales. Indices of internal consistency were much lower for the two pride subscales, most likely owing to the small number of items comprising these subscales in the current version of the SCAAI.

Results

Intercorrelations of SCAAI Subscales

Table 2 presents the intercorrelations of SCAAI subscales. As noted earlier, SCAAI shame and guilt subscales were positively, but moderately correlated. More importantly, the shame and guilt subscales were differentially related to other SCAAI subscales. In particular, there was a strong positive association between the tendency to externalize cause or blame and proneness to shame, but no such relationship was observed when considering proneness to guilt. This difference between shame and guilt correlates of externalization was statistically significant ($t(96) = 3.97$, $p<.05$). The link between shame reactions and externalization of blame is consistent with Lewis' (1971) description of shame-rage or the humiliated fury that often accompanies shame experiences. This pattern of results suggests that when responding to the hypothetical scenarios, subjects report on the entire cognitive/affective sequence associated with such situations, from the initial painful experience of shame to the subsequent defensive attempts to externalize blame.

The hypothesized inverse relationship between detachment/unconcern and shame and guilt was not born out. In the current study, there was essentially no correlation between these subscales. Detachment/unconcern, however, showed a consistent positive relation to the tendency to externalize cause or blame, and as one might expect, a detached/unconcerned orientation appeared conducive to pride responses -- both in connection with the entire self (alpha pride) and in connection with behavior (beta pride).

Finally, the relationship of shame and guilt to the two dimensions of pride warrants some comment. The statistically non-significant negative correlations between alpha pride (pride related to the self) and the two negative self-conscious emotions are more modest than what might have been anticipated. These modest correlations may reflect the low reliability of the alpha pride index, a possibility which seems somewhat less probable in light of the substantial correlation between alpha pride and detachment/unconcern. On the other hand, positive pride responses to situations which are unambiguously positive may, in fact, be orthogonal to the tendency to respond negatively to negatively valenced situations.

Expressions of pride in behavior were unrelated to subjects' proneness to shame. But there was a modest positive correlation between beta pride and proneness to guilt, which is very likely reflective of a generalized tendency, regardless of the valence of situations, to focus on specific behaviors rather than on the global self.

The Relationship of SCAAI Subscales to Other Measures of Shame and Guilt

Table 3 presents the correlations of SCAAI subscales with the Mosher Forced-Choice Guilt Inventory and subscales derived from two methods of scoring the Revised Shame-Guilt Scale (RSGS). As anticipated, SCAAI shame was consistently correlated with shame and guilt subscales derived from adjective checklist, with the sole exception of the third factor, Non-Affectful Guilt. It may be recalled that in responding to the RSGS, subjects are asked to rate the degree to which negative adjectives describe themselves. Thus, subjects are induced to make global attributions and affective responses about the self

rather than about specific behaviors in context. The pattern of findings in Table 3 are consistent with our conceptualization of the RSGS as an undifferentiated index of proneness to shame. Most important, factors derived from the RSGS were differentially related to SCAAI shame but not to SCAAI guilt. This pattern of results lends further support for the conclusion that the SCAAI yields related but functionally distinct shame and guilt subscales. In addition, the consistent correlations between SCAAI externalization of cause or blame and RSGS subscales are congruent with the links between SCAAI shame and defensive externalization discussed in the previous section.

Finally, as hypothesized, SCAAI shame and guilt subscales were both positively related to the two Mosher guilt subscales. This pattern of results is consistent with the author's view that the Mosher Forced-Choice Inventory is, in essence, an undifferentiated index of guilt and shame.

Discussion

Psychologists working from diverse theoretical perspectives have speculated that individual differences in proneness to shame and guilt may have important implications for the development of both adaptive and maladaptive interpersonal and intrapersonal processes. Nonetheless, little empirical research has explored these issues, largely because the field has yet to offer a reliable, valid instrument to assess and differentiate proneness to shame and guilt.

The results of the current study suggest that the recently developed Self-Conscious Affect and Attribution Inventory (SCAAI) yields related, but functionally distinct indices of proneness to shame and proneness to guilt. In this study of 100 undergraduate students, the SCAAI subscales demonstrated satisfactory reliability, as indicated by analyses of the subscales' internal consistency. Moreover, the pattern of relations among SCAAI subscales, as well as their relationship to extant measures of shame and guilt, lends strong support for the validity of this measure. SCAAI shame, but not SCAAI guilt, correlated consistently with subscales drawn from the Revised Shame-Guilt Scale, a measure which we view as a fairly pure index of shame. SCAAI shame and SCAAI guilt subscales were both related to the Mosher Forced-Choice Guilt subscales, a measure which we view as an undifferentiated index of shame/guilt.

Although additional work is currently under way to further validate the SCAAI, these preliminary results provide encouragement for researchers interested in addressing a wide range of issues related to individual differences in moral affective style. In addition, these results raise a number of important theoretical questions. Most notably, the pattern of intercorrelations among SCAAI subscales suggests a dynamic association between shame and defensive externalization. This dynamic association warrants further exploration, for it seems likely that this type of cognitive/affective sequence would have important implications for an individual's motivational and behavioral response to subsequent similar situations in the social arena.

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Table 1

Internal Consistency of SCAAI Subscales.

SCAAI Subscale	# of Items	Alpha Coefficient
Shame	13	.82
Guilt	13	.67
Externalizing	13	.70
Detached	10	.64
Alpha Pride	3	.40
Beta Pride	3	.22

Note: N = 99

Table 2

Intercorrelations of SCAAI Subscales.

SCAAI Subscale	Shame	Guilt	External.	Detached	A. Pride	B. Pride
Shame	—					
Guilt	.48***	—				
Externalizing	.52***	.17	—			
Detached	.08	-.08	.47***	—		
Alpha Pride	-.18	-.13	.15	.42***	—	
Beta Pride	.10	.20*	.31**	.28**	.37***	—

Note: Ns range from 99-100. $p<.05$* $p<.01$** $p<.001$***

Table 3

Correlations of SCAAI Subscales with Two Versions of the Revised Shame-Guilt Scale and Two Subscales of the Mosher Force-Choice Guilt Inventory

	Self-Conscious Affect and Attribution Inventory					
	Shame	Guilt	External.	Detached	A. Pride	B. Pride
Revised Shame-Guilt Scale						
A Priori Shame	.36***	.12	.31**	.07	-.03	.15
A Priori Guilt	.36***	.12	.29**	.10	.06	.11
3 Factor Shame	.38***	.12	.29**	.08	-.18	.08
Affectful Guilt	.41***	.20	.25*	.07	.01	.11
Non-Affectful Guilt	.16	-.08	.26*	.11	.16	.06
Mosher Guilt						
Hostility Guilt	.22*	.38***	-.03	-.26*	-.24*	.04
Moral Conscience	.26**	.31**	-.04	-.22*	-.24*	.05

Note: Correlations based on 88-100 subjects. $p<.05$* $p<.01$** $p<.001$***